

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 SP-02 USIA-06 AID-05 EB-07
NSC-05 EPG-02 TRSE-00 SS-15 STR-04 OMB-01 CEA-01
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EO 11652: NA
TAGS: ELAB, GR
SUB: CARAMANLIS WARNS AGAINST STRIKES DISRUPTIVE TO NATIONAL
WELFARE

REF: ATHENS 1053 (NOTAL

1. SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER CARAMANLIS, HIS GOVERNMENT FACED
BY A SERIES OF NAGGING STRIKES, SPOKE OUT STERNLY ON THE SUBJECT
OF LABOR UNREST YESTERDAY AT A SESSION OF THE FULL CABINET. AN
ACCOUNT OF HIS REMARKS WAS SUBSEQUENTLY MADE AVAILABLE TO THE
PRESS AND APPEARS IN TODAY'S (MAY 18) NEWSPAPERS AS A MAJOR STORY.
THIS IS NOT, OF COURSE, THE FIRST TIME THE PRIME MINISTER HAS
SPOKEN ON THIS SUBJECT AND DENOUNCED WHAT HE HAS LABELLED AS UNREAL-
ISTIC DEMANDS BY LABOR. HOWEVER, HIS TONE WAS FIRMER THIS TIME AS
HE TOLD CABINET MEMBERS THAT GREECE HAS DONE PARTICULARLY WELL
OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS IN RAISING MINIMUM WAGES DURING A PERIOD
OF WORLD-WIDE ECONOMIC DIFFICULTY, BUT THAT EXCESSIVE DEMANDS CAN
THREATEN THE STABILITY OF THE ECONOMY. THE PRIME MINISTER CHARGED
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THAT "CERTAIN ORGANIZATIONS" ARE PRESSING BEYOND ACCEPTABLE
BOUNDS IN THEIR WAGE DEMANDS WITHOUT PROPER JUSTIFICATION FOR
REASONS OF "TRADE UNION DEMOGOGY" OR "SUSPICIOUS POLITICAL
ASPIRATIONS". END SUMMARY.

2. CARAMANLIS CONVENED THE FULL CABINET ON MAY 17 ON SHORT NOTICE
TO REPORT ON HIS MEETINGS IN LONDON AND PARIS AS WELL AS TO DISCUSS

VARIOUS POLICY MATTERS. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO THE MEDIA, WHICH GAVE THE SESSION CONSIDERABLE COVERAGE, THE PREDOMINANT TOPIC WAS THE PRIME MINISTER'S TOUGH REMARKS ON THE LABOR SITUATION. TWO ONGOING STRIKES, ONE BY CIVIL AVIATION PERSONNEL OVER OVERTIME PAYMENTS (WHICH HAS CONSIDERABLY CURTAILED AIR TRANSPORTATION TO AND FROM GREECE) AND A HOSPITAL DOCTORS' STRIKE OVER EMERGENCY TREATMENT (WHICH HAS DISRUPTED HOSPITAL SERVICES), WHICH HAVE BEEN INCREASINGLY AGGRAVATING TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC, HAD OBVIOUSLY MOTIVATED THE PRIME MINISTER TO SPEAK UP ON THE SUBJECT.

3. THE PRIME MINISTER MADE THE FOLLOWING MAIN POINTS:

--MINIMUM REAL WAGES IN THE 1974-76 PERIOD ROSE 28.81 PERCENT, A HIGHER INCREASE THAN INCREASES IN EC COUNTRIES;
--IN CURRENT PRICES, 1977 WAGES WILL BE EIGHTY-SEVEN PERCENT HIGHER FOR MEN AND NINETY-EIGHT PERCENT HIGHER FOR WOMEN COMPARED WITH AUGUST 1974 LEVELS. THE COST-OF-LIVING INDEX DURING THE SAME PERIOD HAS NOT RISEN MORE THAN THIRTY-FOUR PERCENT;
--THE GOG HAS STATED IT WILL NOT ACCEPT "SPECIAL DEMANDS" BY DIFFERENT CLASSES OF WORKERS IN ORDER THAT THE GOVERNMENT CAN PRESERVE THE NATION'S ECONOMIC STABILITY, THE DISTURBANCE OF WHICH WILL AFFECT FIRST AND FOREMOST THE WORKERS THEMSELVES;
--NEVERTHELESS, "CERTAIN ORGANIZATIONS" ARE STRIKING FOR "OBVIOUSLY ILLOGICAL DEMANDS...THEY EVEN COMPETE IN DEMONSTRATING INTRANSIGENCE AND A SPIRIT OF OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT. IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THESE EFFORTS ARE INSPIRED EITHER BY A DESIRE TO CONDUCT TRADE UNION DEMAGOGY OR FOR SUSPICIOUS POLITICAL ASPIRATIONS";
--THE EFFORT TO CREATE SOCIAL DISTURBANCE IS STRENGTHENED BY APATHY ON THE PART OF THE MAJORITY WHO FAIL TO PROTECT THEIR CLASS DIGNITY AND THE INTERESTS OF SOCIETY AS A WHOLE. FOR INSTANCE, ONLY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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361 HOSPITAL DOCTORS IN AN ASSOCIATION COMPOSED OF SOME 4,000 MEMBERS TOOK PART IN A VOTE WHICH RESULTED IN A DECISION "TO CONTINUE THE POINTLESS AND ANTI-SOCIAL STRIKE";
--THE GOG HAS PROVEN ITS DEVOTION TO ALL WORKERS, BUT WILL NOT PERMIT THE WEAKENING OF THE COUNTRY THROUGH SUBMISSION TO TRADE UNIONS OR TO THE "ACTIVITIES OF ORGANIZED MINORITIES".
--ALL CLASSES, IF THEY WANT GREECE TO PROSPER, MUST ACTIVELY SUPPORT THE GOG.

4. COMMENT: LEADING GREECE BACK TO THE PATH OF DEMOCRACY IN THE NEARLY THREE YEARS SINCE HIS RETURN, CARAMANLIS HAS ATTEMPTED TO STRIKE A GENERAL BALANCE BETWEEN STIMULATING NATIONAL GROWTH AND ENCOURAGING A MORE EQUITABLE SHARING OF NATIONAL WEALTH. IN THE PROCESS HE HAS BEEN CRITICIZED FROM MANY SIDES, WITH EACH GROUP ARGUING THAT INSUFFICIENT WEIGHT HAD BEEN GIVEN BY THE GOG TO ITS PARTICULAR DEMANDS. THE GREEK CONSTITUTION PROVIDES FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF TRADE UNION FREEDOM AND THE RIGHT TO STRIKE. HOWEVER, THE GOG HAS WARNED THAT THERE ARE CERTAIN DISRUPTIONS RESULTING FROM THE EXERCISE OF THIS RIGHT WHICH IT WILL NOT TOLERATE,

ESPECIALLY IF THEY ABUSE THE PUBLIC INTEREST AND REPRESENT A
CHALLENGE TO THE GOVERNMENT'S AUTHORITY. THE SITUATION IN GREECE
RESULTING FROM VARIOUS STRIKES IS FAR FROM CRITICAL AT PRESENT--
THUS, CARAMANLIS' STATEMENT TO HIS CABINET (AND THE SUBSEQUENT
PUBLICITY ABOUT IT) REMAINS ONLY A WARNING, ALBEIT A MORE SHARPLY
WORDED ONE THAT HE HAS MADE PREVIOUSLY.
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